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JUDGING SHEEP



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Judging Sheep

IMPROVEMENT of the sheep industry depends in the main on a more general appreciation of what makes a sheep a good or an inferior animal and on a better understanding of how to judge individual sheep by a study of the external parts.

The success or failure of a breeder likewise depends largely on his ability to place the proper weight on each of the various points which must be considered in selecting foundation stock. This ability can be gained only through a careful, systematic study, coupled with a great deal of practice in handling and judging sheep.

Essentials in judging

A constructive breeder of livestock must be able to judge the relative merits of individual animals accurately. A good judge combines a natural aptitude for the work with plenty of experience in handling and judging sheep. The best judges are those who are constantly at it, whether in the field, feed lot, or show ring.

The average person knows less about the procedure to be followed in determining the merit of a sheep than that for judging most other types of livestock. The sheep judge cannot depend entirely on his eyes in reaching a decision; he must also handle the animal. The fleece often covers defects that can be determined only by handling.

Preliminary judging

The score card (p. 2) and a diagram of the animal (fig. 1) are aids in mastering a uniform system of judging

and in learning how to evaluate each part of an animal. Use them in studying a full-grown sheep. Compare each part of the sheep with that shown for the ideal animal and give it a rating. To score 75 out of 100 points, an animal must be good; to score 90 points, it must be choice.

Then study sheep of other ages of the same breed, noting differences between them. Familiarity with descriptions of the various types and breeds is helpful in learning how to be a good judge.

Systematic judging

Once you have learned the position of each part of the animal and how to score it you are ready for systematic judging. In this, you compare the parts of several animals of the same kind, instead of balancing the parts against the ideal, as is done in using the score card.

Follow the same order in making your comparison, part by part, of the individuals before you. For example, compare the heads of the animals in question and decide which one is superior in this particular. Give each animal a letter—as A, B, and C. The beginner will find it best to write down the parts in which each animal excels, together with the way in which it excels.

After all the animals have been examined carefully and the comparison made for each, the best-balanced animal—that is, the one most uniformly perfect in the largest number of important parts and without disqualifying weakness—is placed first in the class; the next best, second; and so on. Keep

Score card for judging mutton sheep

| Scale of points | Possible score | Points given animal judged | |
|---|----------------|----------------------------|--------------------|
| | | Student's score | Instructor's score |
| GENERAL APPEARANCE—25 points: | | | |
| 1. Weight (pounds)..... | 5 | ----- | ----- |
| 2. Form: Straight top and underline; deep, broad, low set for breed; compact; well proportioned..... | 10 | ----- | ----- |
| 3. Quality: Hair fine; bone fine but strong; features fine but not delicate; skin pink..... | 10 | ----- | ----- |
| CONDITION—12 points: | | | |
| 4. Flesh covering: Deep, even, firm; points indicating finish are fullness in shoulder and brisket, thick covering over top of shoulders, back, ribs, and loin, thick dock..... | 12 | ----- | ----- |
| HEAD AND NECK—9 points: | | | |
| 5. Head: Clean-cut, strong mouth, thin lips; large nostrils; large, clear eyes, alert look; face short; forehead broad; ears alert not coarse, considerable width between ears..... | 5 | ----- | ----- |
| 6. Neck: Short, thick, smoothly joined with shoulder..... | 4 | ----- | ----- |
| FOREQUARTERS—10 points: | | | |
| 7. Shoulders: Compact on top; smoothly joined with neck and body; well covered with flesh..... | 8 | ----- | ----- |
| 8. Brisket: Full, round, and well extended..... | 1 | ----- | ----- |
| 9. Legs: Straight, short, wide apart..... | 1 | ----- | ----- |
| BODY—18 points: | | | |
| 10. Chest: Deep, wide, full..... | 2 | ----- | ----- |
| 11. Ribs: Well sprung, long, close, and thickly covered..... | 4 | ----- | ----- |
| 12. Back: Broad, straight, thickly and evenly covered with flesh..... | 6 | ----- | ----- |
| 13. Loin: Wide, thick, well covered..... | 6 | ----- | ----- |
| HINDQUARTERS—17 points: | | | |
| 14. Hips: Wide apart, level, smooth..... | 1 | ----- | ----- |
| 15. Rump: Long, level, wide, and thick at dock..... | 4 | ----- | ----- |
| 16. Thighs: Full, deep, wide..... | 4 | ----- | ----- |
| 17. Twist: Deep, firm, plump, joined well down on leg..... | 5 | ----- | ----- |
| 18. Legs: Straight, short, strong, wide apart..... | 1 | ----- | ----- |
| 19. Udder or scrotum: Ewe's udder, well formed, large, and soft; in rams, both testicles large and well developed..... | 2 | ----- | ----- |
| WOOL—9 points: | | | |
| 20. Quantity: Long, dense, even in density and length..... | 3 | ----- | ----- |
| 21. Quality: Crimp distinct and even; oil uniformly distributed throughout fleece..... | 3 | ----- | ----- |
| 22. Condition: Strong in fiber, clean, soft, and bright..... | 3 | ----- | ----- |
| Total | 100 | ----- | ----- |

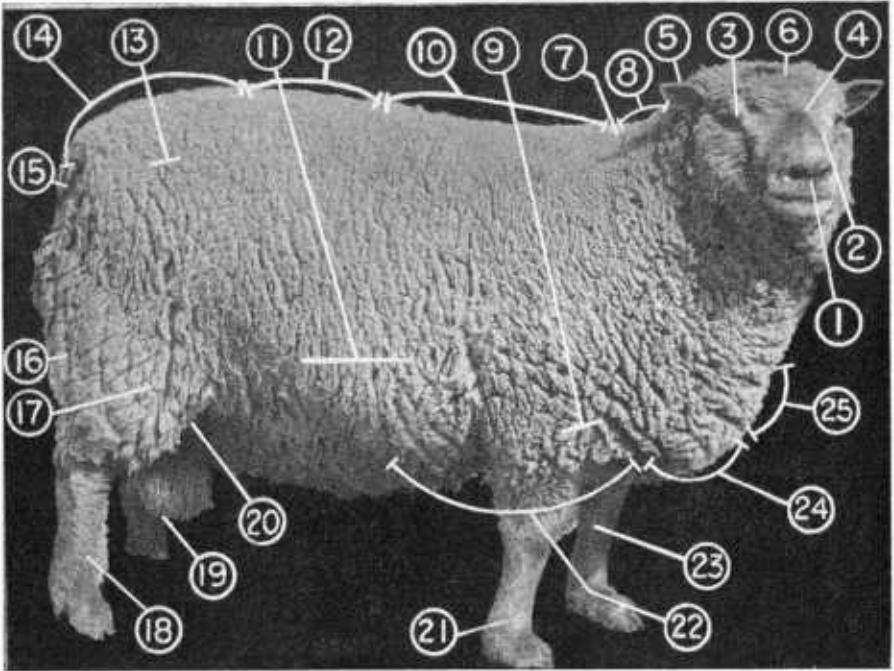
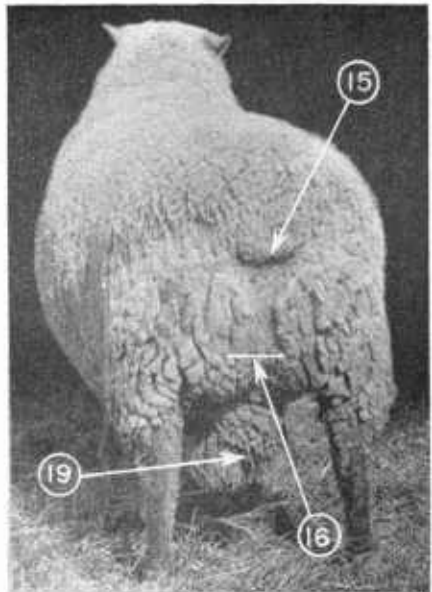


Figure 1.—The external parts of an ideal sheep: 1, Muzzle broad, lips thin, nostrils large; 2, face short, features clean-cut; 3, eyes large and clear; 4, forehead broad; 5, ears alert and not coarse; 6, poll wide; 7, top of shoulder compact; 8, neck short, thick, blending smoothly with shoulder; 9, shoulder thickly covered with flesh; 10, back broad, straight, thickly and evenly covered; 11, ribs long, well sprung, and thickly covered; 12, loins broad, thick, and well covered; 13, hips wide and smooth; 14, rump long, level, and wide to dock; 15, dock thick; 16, twist deep and firm; 17, thighs full, deep, and wide; 18, legs straight and short and bone smooth; 19, cod or purse in wether, scrotum in ram, udder in ewe; 20, flank full and deep; 21, forelegs straight, short, and strong; 22, chest deep, wide, and full; 23, forelegs wide apart and forearm strong; 24, brisket full and rounding in outline; 25, breast well extended.



clearly fixed in mind your reasons for placing any animal ahead of any other, and be able to give them verbally or in writing.

In giving the comparisons do not try to describe each animal; just tell wherein each is superior or inferior to the others. For example, where there are three breeding ewes in a ring and B is placed first, A second, and C third, the procedure would be as follows:

B is placed first because she has a stronger back, deeper body, larger leg of mutton, and a higher quality fleece than A or C. A is placed second because she has a stronger constitution,

to rush in and start the actual handling too soon. Experienced judges at fairs and large shows start handling at once, but they are able to do so largely because of practice, which makes possible the quick sizing up of an animal.

Distant inspection

The first step in systematic judging of sheep is to stand at a distance and get the general lines and make-up of the individual. Strive to get a mental picture of the animal and fix the picture in your mind.

It is best to follow some uniform system in judging a sheep or a class of sheep. The following is suggested:

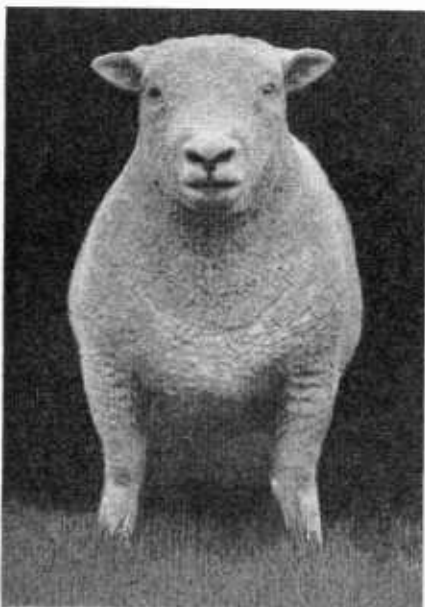


Figure 2.—A good mutton-type ram. He has a masculine head, is wide through the shoulders and floor of the chest. His legs are well placed; the bone is strong and smooth.

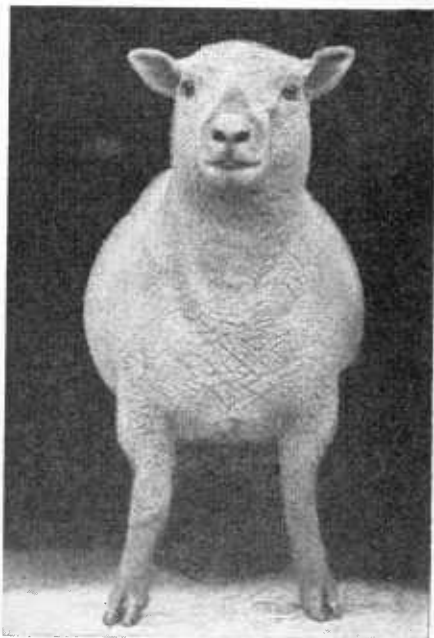


Figure 3.—A good mutton-type ewe. Her head is more refined than that of the ram.

as shown by her greater depth and width of chest, greater width of loin, and brighter skin than C. C is placed third because of a weak back, light hindquarters, and a dull skin, showing that she is out of condition.

Beginners in judging sheep are likely

While viewing the sheep in front note the make-up of the head. Is it well proportioned? A ram should have a strong, bold head, showing masculinity (fig. 2); a ewe should have a feminine appearance (fig. 3).

In making the distant inspection of

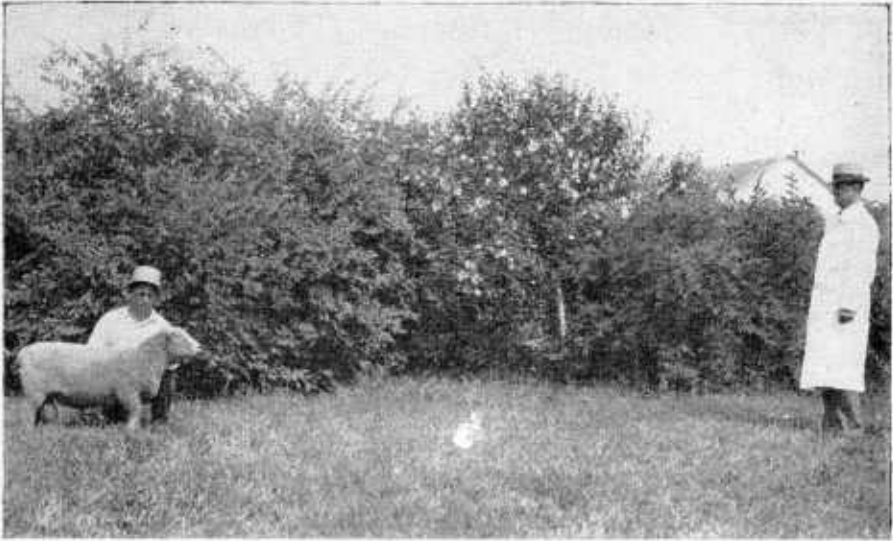


Figure 4.—Viewing a sheep from the front.

the animal from the front (fig. 4), note also the width and depth of the brisket, and the length, shape, and general position of the front legs.

From the side observe the animal's size and general style (fig. 5). Are the

top line and the under line parallel? In the most desirable animals the body is of good length and depth. Take special note of the way the sheep carries its head. Does it look sluggish; or does it look full of vigor? Be sure to

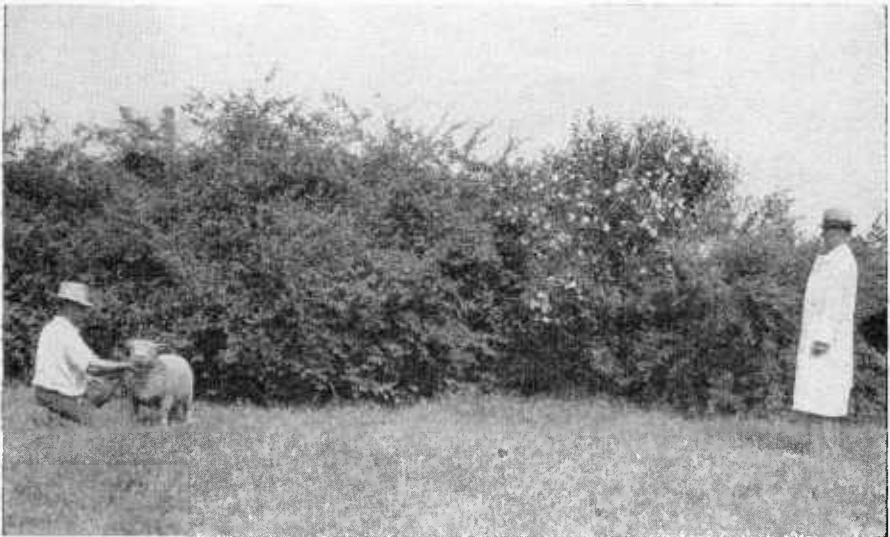


Figure 5.—Viewing a sheep from the side.

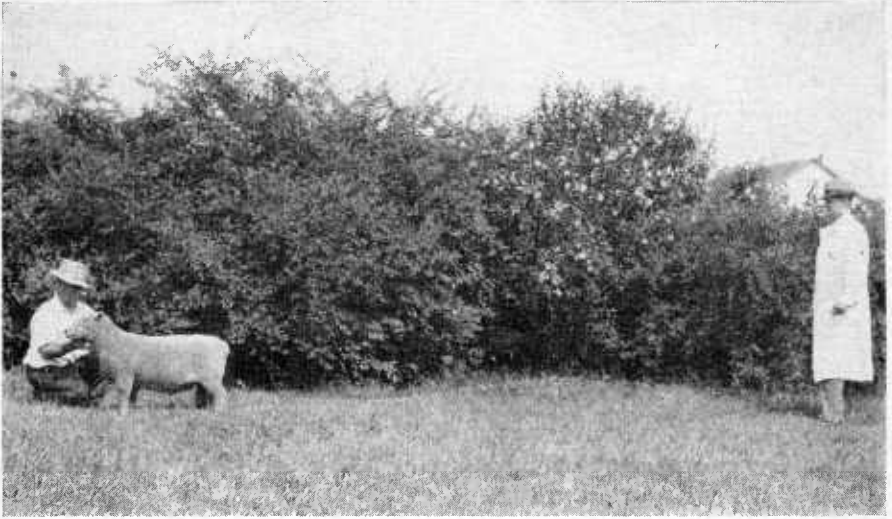


Figure 6.—Viewing a sheep from the rear.

fix in your mind the length of the neck, its setting, and the relation of head and neck, body (or middle), and rump to the total length. A desirable animal is well proportioned in these respects.

Now view the sheep from behind

(fig. 6). Width of the rump and its straightness and evenness are specially important. The thighs should be full and the twist deep. The hind legs should be well placed, strong, and of good size for the individual.



Figure 7.—Inspecting the head of a sheep.

Close inspection

After you have carefully inspected the sheep from a distance and noted its general make-up, verify your observations by going over it with your hand. In doing this keep your fingers close together so as to leave no depressions in the fleece; sprawling fingers may easily mar the evenness and smoothness of the fleec of a sheep when it is fitted for showing.

Keep in mind the impressions you have gained of the animal when you come to the handling. If you do this you are not likely to make a mistake in your decision. Practice in judging is necessary to gain the correct touch. Pounding or clawing the animal is entirely out of order.

Head

Observe the shape of the head (fig. 7). If the animal is a male, the head should be strong; if female, it should be more refined. Note the width of the face and forehead, the brightness of the eye, and the placement of the ears. Before leaving the head look at the teeth of the sheep to determine its age (see p. 12). When judging rams of hornless breeds, place your fingers in the horn holes to make sure there is no growth there (fig. 8). Rams of hornless breeds should be free of scurs, or growth of horn tissue. With your left hand determine whether there is any enlarged growth, or goiter.

Neck

The neck should be short and thick, smoothly attached at the head and top of the shoulders (fig. 9). A ram's neck should be shorter and thicker than a ewe's.

Neck vein

The neck vein should be full and should join smoothly with the shoulders. Fullness in the neck vein indicates high condition and a well-muscled neck (fig. 10). Touch the lower points of the shoulder to determine



Figure 8.—Inspecting head of hornless ram.



Figure 9.—Inspecting the neck.



Figure 10.—Inspecting the neck vein.

whether the bones are unduly prominent or are well covered with flesh.

Shoulders and chest

To determine the compactness at the top of the shoulders and the depth of the chest, place your right hand on top of the shoulders, noting how compactly the shoulder blades are set up against the spine, as well as the way the flesh covers the top of the shoulders (fig. 11). Place your left hand on the floor of the brisket and chest to determine the



Figure 11.—Judging the shoulders and chest.

width. Note the depth of chest by keeping your right hand on top of the shoulder.

Flesh and ribs

To pass on the condition of the covering of flesh and at the same time on the spring of the ribs from the spine, place your hand just back of the shoulder blades, with your thumb and fingers forming a V (fig. 12). A full spring of the ribs is desirable.

Chest

It is important that a sheep be full in the chest. The flesh covering should

be even and thick down over the ribs. There should be fullness back of the shoulder, as indicated by the position of the judge's hand in figure 13. The ribs should be well covered and the spaces between the ribs should be well filled with firm flesh.

Back

Placing your hand firmly on the sheep's back, with fingers together, note the strength of the back and the



Figure 12.—Noting condition of the flesh and spring of the ribs.

condition of the covering over it (fig. 14). Observe carefully the spring of the ribs, especially the last rib. The width of a well-shaped barrel, or body, increases gradually from the shoulders back to the last rib. A large, well-developed middle is desirable in breeding ewes.

Loin

Determine the width of the loin by putting one hand straight down on



Figure 13.—Noting flesh on the ribs and girth over the heart.

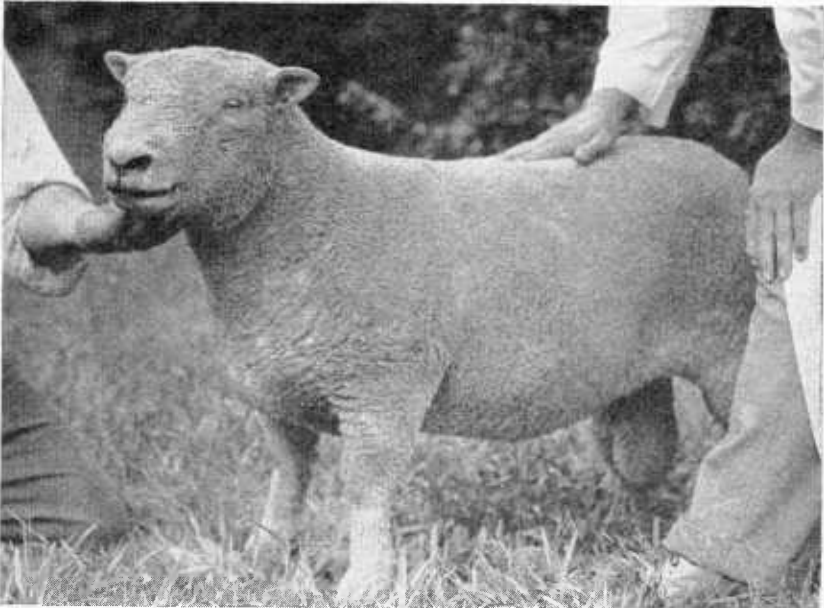


Figure 14.—Judging strength and covering of the back.



Figure 15.—Determining width of the loin.



Figure 16.—Inspecting the rump.



Figure 17.—Noting depth of the twist.

each side of it (fig. 15), and the thickness of the loin by placing your fingers flat over the spine and noting whether the bones are well covered with flesh.

Rump

The rump should be level and it should carry its fullness out to the tail-head. The hips should be wide apart and smooth and the rump should be full in the place where the hands are shown in figure 16. To determine the width and fullness of the rump, grasp the dock and note its size and fullness. A wide, thick dock indicates deep, strong muscling along the spine. A good filling of fat on each side between the dock and rump indicates high condition, more important in fat sheep than in breeding sheep.

Twist

Determine the depth and firmness of the twist by placing your left hand on top of the rump and your right hand under the twist and pressing up slightly (fig. 17). A full twist is desirable; it helps to make a plump leg of lamb or mutton.

Leg

To determine the size of the leg of lamb or mutton, place your left hand in front of the leg, close to the body, and your right hand in the rear (fig. 18). The leg should be of good size and full, and the fullness should be carried well down to the hock.

Fleece on body

After you have determined the conformation of the sheep, carefully examine the fleece on the fore part of the body. The best wool grows on the shoulder, or just back of it. Part the wool here by laying your hands on the surface and gently forcing the fleece to part (fig. 19). When the wool is open, note its density, quality, color, and condition. Determine the density of the fleece by grasping some between your thumb and finger. If the wool feels compact and fills your hand it is

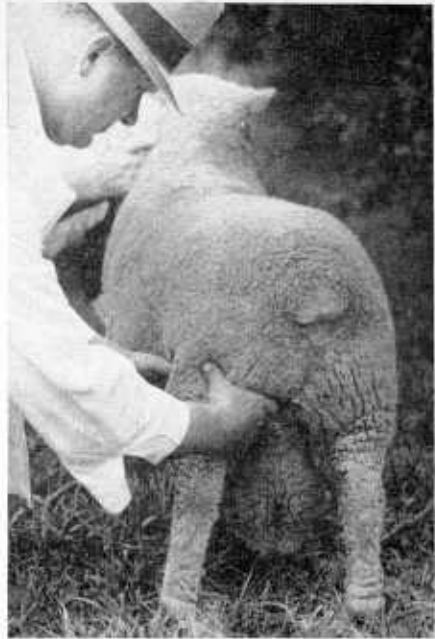


Figure 18.—Determining the leg development.



Figure 19.—Examining the fleece and skin of a sheep.

likely to be dense. The waves, or crimp, in the fibers indicate the quality of the wool. When they are short and carry regularly from the skin to the outer tips, the wool usually is fine and even in quality. Condition of the fleece is determined by its color, the yolk (the oily fat secreted by glands at the roots of the wool fibers), and the foreign material in it. Wool in good condition is bright, fairly clean, and free from chaff and burs, with the yolk evenly distributed. Examine the fleece



Figure 20.—Examining fleece on the thigh.

at the midside of the body in the same way. In fine-wool breeds, examine the fleece also at the dock and on the belly.

Skin

While parting the wool to determine its condition note the animal's skin. In healthy animals the skin is usually pink and clear. Dark skin, bluish and harsh, may be a sign of poor health.

Fleece on thigh

Examine the fleece on the thigh as directed for the examination of fleece

on the body (fig. 20). In mutton breeds the wool on the thigh should have as nearly as possible the same quality and character as that on the shoulder and it should be free from coarse fibers, or kemp.

When handling rams it is advisable to notice the serotum. Both testicles should be normally developed. In handling ewes, examine the udder. If it is hard, or otherwise defective, some deductions should be made from the animal's score.

In judging fat sheep, note particularly whether the animal is "overdone," as indicated by an excess of soft, loose fat over the ribs and sides. This counts against the animal.

Inspection of teeth

Although not always possible to determine the exact age of a sheep from its teeth, a fairly close estimate can be made from them. A little practice makes it possible to tell at least the approximate age from an inspection of an animal's teeth.

To expose a sheep's teeth, hold the animal's head with both your hands, place the first and second fingers of one hand on the sheep's lips, and exert a slight pressure (figs. 21 to 26).

Lamb's mouth

All the baby teeth are present soon after the birth of a lamb. They are small and are known as the milk teeth or the lamb teeth (fig. 21).

Yearling's mouth

When the sheep is from 12 to 14 months old, two permanent front teeth (fig. 22) come in. They are larger and usually whiter than the milk teeth, which are on either side of them.

Two-year-old's mouth

At 22 to 24 months, another pair of permanent teeth come in, one tooth on each side of the front pair (fig. 23).

Three-year-old's mouth

At 34 to 36 months, the third pair of permanent teeth come in, one tooth on each side of the first two pairs.



Figure 21.—Lamb's mouth.



Figure 22.—Yearling's mouth.



Figure 23.—Two-year-old's mouth.



Figure 24.—Three-year-old's mouth.



Figure 25.—Full, or 4-year-old's, mouth.



Figure 26.—Broken mouth of aged sheep.

Full, or 4-year-old's, mouth

At 46 to 48 months, a sheep has a full mouth, with all its permanent teeth (fig. 25). From then on only an estimate of the age is possible from the mouth. As a sheep grows older its teeth gradually spread and usually become shorter with wear.

Broken mouth

As a sheep grows older still it gradually loses its teeth. A broken-mouth sheep (fig. 26) has trouble in eating; as a rule, it should not be kept in the flock.

Market cuts

In judging fat sheep, keep in mind the various market cuts and their relative importance. The market wants a well-finished carcass. The most expensive cuts come from the leg, loin, and ribs, the cheaper cuts from the shoulder, breast, and shank (fig. 27).

The weight of a mutton carcass varies with the age, breed, and degree of fatness. The trade likes mature wethers to weigh 140 pounds. Lambs weighing 80 to 90 pounds, of good conformation and in prime condition, usually bring the highest market price.

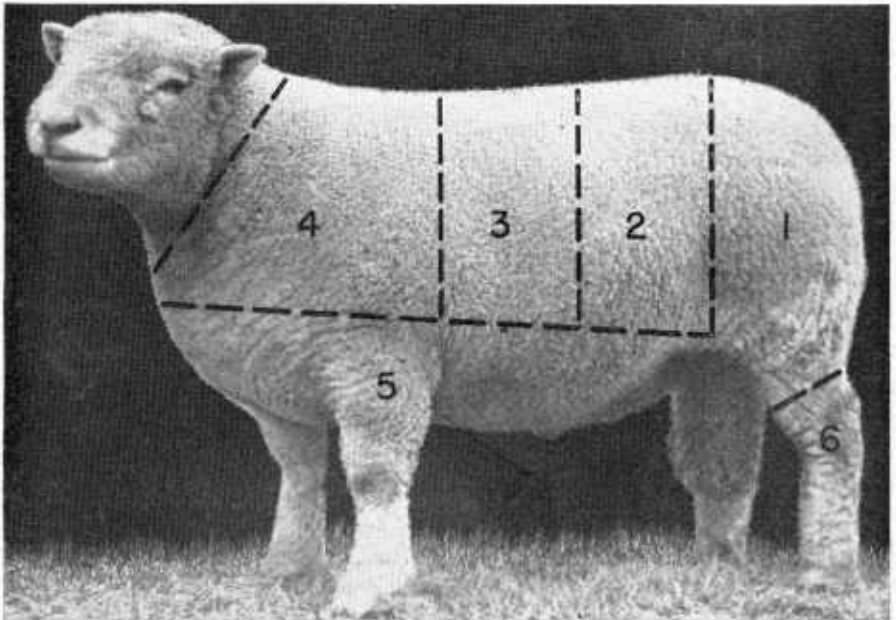


Figure 27.—Mutton and lamb cuts. Each half carcass is divided as shown: 1, Leg; 2, loin; 3, ribs; 4, shoulder; 5, breast; 6, shank.

